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AUTHOR Routh, Robert D.
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ABSTRACT

Image making, like writing and speaking, is a carrier of ideas. This paper presents photography as therapy, a useful concept for advocates of humanistic education. The paper shows that Western civilization, due to its preoccupation with science, technology, and commerce, enhances and promotes left-hemispheric brain functions (verbal, analytical, and sequential functions), while it downgrades or neglects right-hemispheric functions (intuitive, holistic, spacial functions). In effect, students are being "educated lopsidedly." The paper concludes that, to promote "balanced thinkers," who can then become "balanced doers," educational activities (such as photography) need to be integrated with the rest of the school curriculum, resulting in more-complete individuals functioning in harmony with their environments. (RL)

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PHOTOGRAPHY AS THERAPY

BY

ROBERT D. ROUTH
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, PHOTOGRAPHY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH (CSULB)

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Today, I am addressing you, not only as a photography teacher concerned about the role of photography in education, but as one who is interested in the concepts of visual literacy. It is my concern that in the need for photography as a tool to achieve worthwhile goals--such as learning history or social studies or how to read--some of the other important advantages of photography may become neglected.

I have chosen as subject of this talk, Photography As Therapy, because this is one area among many areas in which photography is uniquely qualified.

To adequately discuss this topic, I find myself seeking to place "photography as therapy" in "holistic" perspective, i.e. where it fits into the total picture of education. This means that I shall be talking about some philosophical issues that I believe must be discussed in order to properly position the significance of my topic. As I shall be making an important issue of this concern, within my text, I felt it necessary to justify, by this explanation, what could appear to be an unnecessary extension of my topic. Certainly, those among you who reason holistically will appreciate this concern!

Like writing and speaking, image-making is a carrier of ideas. In this respect, photography excels. Its access to large numbers of people give it a universality. As a language, it

is particularly adapted to description, bringing together holistically, concepts about subjects that would require long linear chains of written or spoken words which could not as adequately sum up the total properties of those concepts. The photographic image, as a conveyor of emotions, instantly arouses--at the flip of a print--feelings of compassion, anger and excitement. But perhaps photography's most unique quality is that it is believed: as if we stood before a window as a witness to a scene sharing many conceptual things in common with others. However, bringing to our vision the contents of our personal containers of the sums of our previous experiences, defines us as individuals. It is this property that we shall later consider in detail when discussing photography as therapy, because, while photography as communication labels our capacity to share ideas that we hold in common; photography as therapy concerns itself about those ideas that we hold as unique individuals.

Man's approach to problem-solving can generally be divided into two distinct yet dependent brain functions, often referred to as right and left hemisphere functions. There is adequate research on this matter, and regardless of the specifics of the findings--and probable disagreements as to these specifics--nevertheless, historically, these distinct functions have been alluded to and described throughout the history of man. Recent terminology confines these major functions loosely to a left, verbal, analytical, sequential function; and to a right, intuitive, holistic, spacial function (at the risk of gross simplification). It is generally recognized that Western

Civilization, in its preoccupation with science, technology and commerce, has concerned itself with an intensive concentration on functions usually ascribed to the left hemisphere of the brain. This has been reflected in educational theory and practice, the emphasis being placed on reading, writing and new math, with little regard for the visual, holistic, intuitive, imaginative side of the brain. Most researchers agree that there has been such an educational imbalance and are beginning to sense its effect on education. It is the bearing on education of the meaning of this imbalance that is the importance of contemporary research. As you can see, I have extended the disposition of the brain to function holistically as a process, to an explanation of a cultural condition. In other words, the way in which we, as a nation of individuals, traditionally use our minds, has shaped our culture.

Some researchers, like Dr. J.E. Bogen, M.D., believe that: "If our society has overemphasized propositionality (left hemisphere) at the expense of appositionality (right hemisphere), more is involved than the adjustment dfficulties of isolated individuals. It means that the entire student body is being educated lopsidedly. Have not certain pedagogic policies often tended to aggravate and prolong this one-sidedness? For example, the usual justification of 'IQ' tests is that they predict further scholastic achievement and that the latter is in turn predictive of 'life success.' This is ultimately based upon a criterion of 'success' which is not only most often measured

monetarily, but it seems to depend in part upon an analytical attitude hypertrophied by centuries of contention against nature. It is a view which culminates, when extreme, in measuring national 'success' by the gross national product and in measuring progress of the human species in terms of total population.....Such a criterion is clear, quantitative, and graphable; and it avoids altogether any concern for the quality of human existence."[1.]

Jack Debes alludes to the possibility of super intellectual powers that can result when a more equitable use of the hemispheres is brought to bear on problem-solving.[2.] This implies, interestingly, that the convenient separation of persons in terms of, for example, an artistic person as opposed to a scientific person, may, in fact, not in all cases be a referrent to a right or left hemispherically-oriented person, but rather be related to the ways in which these hemispheres interact with each other. This suggests that our most celebrated artists and scientists are indeed active creatures of both of these hemispheric worlds, and have become the better for it. Albert Einstein supposedly combined the logic and analysis of verbal languaging with visual imagery to soar beyond the confines of the traditional scientific methods.

[1.] Dr. J.E. Bogen, M.D., "Some Educational Aspects of Hemispheric Specialization," UCLA Educator (Los Angeles: The University of California, 1975), Vol. 17, No. 2. p. 29.

[2.] Robert D. Routh, "Photography Education--A Path to Total Learning?" Camera on Campus, Petersen's PhotoGraphic Magazine (Los Angeles: Petersen Publishing Company, 1976), August issue, p. 14.

Dr. Robert E. Ornstein, in his most revealing book, The Psychology of the Consciousness, has compared some of the bases for the Western and Eastern psychologies.[3] While, as mentioned previously, Western culture has emphasized analytical, linear and sequential modes of learning, Eastern thought tends to be holistic and intuitive in nature. Although the concept of holistic learning is generally confined in meaning to a specific attitude towards problem-solving, it has important practical implications in the day-to-day conduct of human affairs. In saying that the holistic function consists of the intuitive gathering together of the linear and analytical specifics into concepts of overview, we describe a process; it is the practical application of such a process that makes it critical to human endeavor for in extending it to a practical basis, we see it as a judgment upon our left hemispheric functions calling them into account and giving them purpose and meaning and perspective. This possibly suggests that in our current educational theory, we have, in fact, misplaced our priorities--that there is a fundamental hierarchy to mental processing, and that we, in our failure to recognize this, have, in fact, distorted the educational process.

So, while the Western Civilization continues to proliferate in mindless bureaucracy in which systems become rulers and man becomes their slave in a rush to consumption that depletes resources and destroys environments and endangers health--

[3] Dr. Robert E. Ornstein, The Psychology of Consciousness (New York: Penguin Books Inc., 1972).

in a sense, our entire civilization appears to be dominated by left hemispheric functions--while, on the other hand, in Eastern Civilizations, intellectuals often remove themselves intellectually from the miseries of disease, starvation, over-population, denigrating much of what we have come to know as quality of life, and yet it remains within each of us as individuals, to use and to enjoy the best of both worlds, for it is not just the capacity of leaders to instruct mankind in ways of self-preservation, but it is within the capacities of each individual, by utilizing mental functions already available to him to reason his own destiny and the destiny of those who follow.

For those who seek ready access to the right hemispheric function, one approach involves a means of turning off the left hemisphere in order to gain access to the resources of the right. A common technique for arriving at such a condition is meditation, often accomplished by chanting or contemplating a question such as, "What did my face look like before I was conceived?", which, of course, cannot be answered: i.e. analytical functions can yield no successful response. When the conscious functions are thus suppressed, the unconscious mind delivers its resources. Resources that are said to be, among other things, intuitive flashes that carry the deepest meanings for man.

Charles Harbutt alludes to this in the Epilogue of his book, Travelog, when he writes: "The moment of creation in

photography is similar to a state of consciousness very much sought after in yoga. Or Gestalt therapy. It is to be at the exact center of one's being, where an awareness of everything going on inside oneself--in fantasy, memory, emotions and thought--is balanced by sensitivity to what is happening outside the person and what it means and feels and is. If a photographer can become sufficiently aware of this continuum and have the energy to push a shutter when inside and outside click together, that camera might produce some very fine photographs indeed. And they would be unique and original (good or bad) because the particular way the world would fall into space from that camera angle could not be seen by any other camera. One couldn't occupy the same physical place. And because that particular continuum is totally personal. And because a person is different from moment to moment. As is the world. But all one's photographs would share that unique personal way of being alive, and it is this being-aliveness that viewers can respond to."[4].

Undoubtedly, artists in their absorbtion with their works, transcend the routine of the left hemisphere and deliver, if successful, their intuitive core in the form of an art work. Moreover, this capacity is available to all through the medium of photography when one uses a camera and becomes a maker of images.

[4]. Charles Harbutt. "I Don't Take Pictures; Pictures Take Me," Travelog (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1973).

Dr. William M. Resch, psychology professor, California State University, Long Beach, has offered an interesting hypothesis concerning the tremendous student interest in photography: "I have a feeling, my own theory, that human beings inherently want to develop the instrument that is there--body, brain, mind, whatever. The one advantage photography has is that it has not been taught in schools the way that writing and reading have been taught. Implicit in my ideas is the thought that the way things were taught destroy, or at least diminish, the sense of joy that anyone would feel in developing a skill about themselves. Kids develop a negative reaction to a lot of teaching--a fear. Kids are going to remember that photography is a subject they haven't been punished for. I am guessing that it reflects, in good measure, a kind of thirst to develop. That's quite unconscious, I'm sure, but I'm guessing that the human organism gets a joy in developing these tools. You can kill this off by offering a survey course in photography and having students memorize dates and places. Students are proud, I am sure, of something they have done. There is no better reason in the world for learning."[5].

This motivation to make images is central to the substance of this paper. Regardless of its source, it involves a reaching from the internal to the external; from a need to

[5]. Robert D. Routh, "The Teaching of a New Language?" Petersen's PhotoGraphic Magazine (Los Angeles: Petersen Publishing Company, 1975), October issue, p.80.

a satisfaction. Many photography classes treat this satisfaction as a participation in a kind of magic trick in which the process becomes an end product in itself; the description of the objects by the camera being a sufficient justification. It is probably all of this, but I believe, much more. It becomes, in a fascinating sense, a way to visually externalize the internal. It becomes the referrent to a feedback system which enables the participant to react in a personal way to that which has occured to him earlier in time. The extent to which this becomes therapeutic is directly related to the personal nature of the photographed object--of its special meaning to the photographer. This means that to fully make use of this resource, the act of photography should be non-directed: only broad parameters might be employed such as "photograph your family or your neighborhood," to encourage the photographer to become personally involved and absorbed in making images that reflect his personal involvement with the environment; externalizing his inner feelings rather than responding to an assigned project in the traditional sense. Looking at these images with the attitudes of images as carriers of certain kinds of ideas that relate in a personal way to the individual, serves as resource for feedback for self-analysis.

An important and often overlooked aspect of making images is the desire to share them. This is a powerful, therapeutic tool in the hands of a trained teacher; an access to even the most undisciplined of students. The photograph becomes

a bridge in which diverse cultural backgrounds can meet and develop understanding. But even more, a trained teacher can discover and open doorways to possible solutions of students' personal problems. And whereas the teacher might not, in his day-to-day handling of students, be adequately qualified to develop a program of therapy, he can, in any event, become a friend, a visual listener, so to speak, and in some instances, direct the student to other, more qualified persons.

If this were all the benefits of such an approach, it would indeed be eminently worthwhile, but there is a larger and even more universal function to be considered. That we live in a stressful society is seldom denied. And while there may be some disagreement as to what is meant by intuitive, holistic approaches to problem-solving, there can be no denying that in our dynamic thrust towards becoming a leading technological society, we have, in fact, utilized the capacities of our left hemisphere to such a refined and dominant state of efficiency, that we have lost sight of the holistic overall consequences of our actions. For example, it takes a shortage to develop a solution that should have been understood and controlled long before it became critical. It is only with great effort that environmentalists find it possible to control the irrational destruction of our natural resources, becoming, in fact, a battle between the holistic overview as opposed to the linear, analytical, systematic day-by-day needs of an industrial society.

We must be aware that, as Harold Taylor, in his Art and the Intellect, states: "The difference between a school or college and all the other institutions of society is that the particular kind of experience we give to the student is selected in terms of an idea about what we want the child to become. The difference then between the school and society is that the ultimate concern of the school is with moral value, or, with the idea of what the child ought to become and what man ought to be."[6].

It becomes an obligation to develop within our schools a kind of balance that will deliver into our society, a leveling influence, or to put it in concrete terms, now that we have learned to make machines of industry, we must learn how to rule them, give them direction and purpose, and, above all, a schedule developed by man, not by allegiance to the machine, in the name of progress. What I am getting at is that while we are not, in my opinion, a sick society--as is so often layered on us by many authors--we are, in fact, the victims of a distortion of our reasoning process and a steady erosion of our humanity. To this extent, a partial but important part of the solution might be that our education become a sharing of the internal mental functions of the right and left hemispheres in order to solve external problems. We must become balanced thinkers in order to become balanced doers.

[6]. Harold Taylor, Art and the Intellect (New York: Published for The National Committee on Art Education, 1966) p. 51.

It seems imcumbent upon us as educators in our concern for the future of our students that we impress upon them the value of the holistic, intuitive approach to problems; indeed this would be a unique contribution to their growth as it seems that nowhere else in human experience is this emphasized. It is most interesting to conjecture that in some strange and marvelous way, whoever or whatever is responsible for this universe has designed a fantastic mechanism which allows us to organize, analyze, systematize a linear way to house us, clothe us, feed us: a process which, if misused, is capable of the ultimate destruction of man's and his environment. And yet, this grand designer/sustainer has waiting in the wings, so to speak, another little-used hemisphere that is capable of exerting controls in the form of intuitions and holistic viewpoints which ultimately could perform as the only influence available to man that can save him from eventual destruction.

So, you see, when I use the word, "therapy," I am talking about a problem that is of concern to us all. I am talking about a kind of education in which the student becomes a participant in an active vital therapeutic sense rather than as a passive recipient. This means that programs must recognize the uniqueness, human-ness and individuality of the student, and must seek to reach--through images--his personal feelings, to deal with in a humanitarian and personal way. This does not mean that the traditional methods of conveying

information in a descriptive sense are not valid for the teaching skills such as reading, writing and new math, but it does mean that at the same time it must be remembered that the commitment of education is finally, in the last and most telling analysis, a commitment to the individual, to his total capabilities as a human being. And most importantly, not only to his abilities to analyze but to that remarkable spark that has supplied the ultimate reasons for all of man's most cherished endeavors, and, in fact, is ultimately his only hope for survival, intuition--perhaps the most important inhabitant of the right hemisphere.

We must not fall into the trap of becoming predominantly linear and sequential, losing sight of the whole, as so often has been the case of technology. It seems fitting that the philosophy of the International Visual Literacy Association should be holistic in nature; intuitive in direction. It seems to me that there will be much to do about this business of visual literacy when the educational community suddenly "discovers" the full educational implications of the two-brain concept, and rushes in to shower education with a glittering mantle of edicts, proclaiming to have finally solved all educational dilemmas. It behooves us as thoughtful people coming together as an association to maintain a holistic and intuitive posture (which we have so effectively described in our research), attempting to view the total holistic picture. In its finest sense, this means an education of the total person.